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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 290.—Vol. XI. FOR WEEK ENDING JULY 21, 1894. [Price One Penny.

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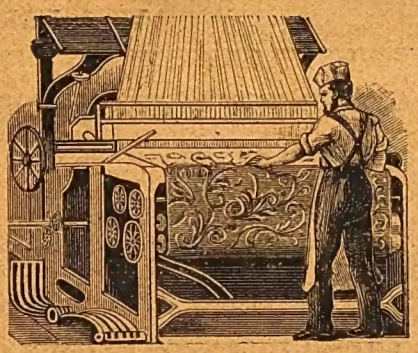

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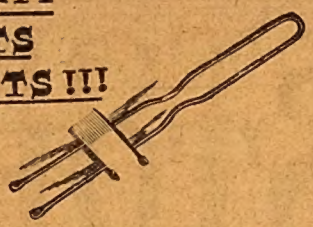

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No. 290.—Vol. XI. *FOR THE WEEK ENDING JULY 21, 1894.* [PRICE ONE PENNY.

A Lost Soul

IT was a chance remark, and one that is often made concerning an intelligent animal, but its effect upon my friend Sidney Darrow was very remarkable indeed.

His shoulders twitched nervously, and his hand went up to his throat as though something choked him.

I have a large mastiff that I call Wodan. A moment before he had left his accustomed place on the rug in the corner of the room and had come to my side to receive the caress which at intervals through the day he seems to find necessary to his happiness. As I smoothed his wrinkled forehead and patted his soft large ears, I observed with what trustful affection his great eyes beamed on me.

It was then that I remarked to Sidney Darrow, who sat near at hand carelessly watching us through the smoke of his pipe:

"Does it not seem to you sometimes that Wodan has a very human look?"

And my friend made answer with the peculiar motions which I have described.

Wodan left my side and walked slowly back to his rug. Darrow watched his movements with half-closed eyes, his hand still clutching his throat. When the dog had laid down, my friend turned his gaze upon me.

"Don't—don't ever say that about Wodan again. It will make me hate him."

He was plainly much disturbed, and the seriousness of his appeal was not to be doubted.

Presently, before I was ready to make any reply, he separated the heavy beard that covered his chin and neck, disclosing a deep zigzag scar.

"See here," he said, "I never showed you this."

"What made it—a burn?"

"No. Let me tell you the story."

* * *

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There was a period in my life, some years ago, that I spent on my uncle's ranch in Australia. At that time, as I believe it is now, the raising of sheep was one of the chief industries of Victoria, and much of the land in our vicinity was devoted to pasturage.

About half-a-mile from my uncle's house, in a lonely valley, stood the hut of a herder—built of wood, repulsive without, cheerless within, grim and squalid, that one might think he had constructed it about himself, as the nautilus does his shell.

He was a tall, hard-visaged Basque, with a great shaggy black beard, haggard features, and eyes that you could not look into without a shudder. Do you understand what I mean? He was one of those wild beasts of men whose faces, seen but once, live always in your memory; and when sleep will not come they show themselves—bodiless masks as they are—through your tightly closed eyelids.

The trail of the valley passed within a few yards of the hut, and my duties—I assisted my uncle in the management of the ranch—frequently led me in that direction. When not away on the hillside with his flock of sheep, the herder usually stood or squatted motionless in front of his hovel. A few feet away from him crouched his dog.

The pair, man and beast, stared at me from the moment I came in sight, until I passed amongst the oaks beyond, making no movement, save a slow turning of the head, and offering no response to my salutation. At last I came to pass them in silence, but never without a vague sense of dread.

I learned from the men on my uncle's ranch that the Basque was considered queer, or, as they expressed it, "locoed." They said he was in the habit of talking to his dog, as though he were a man, and that even his fellow-countrymen feared and avoided him.

Crazy he may have been; a drunkard he certainly was. At frequent intervals he appeared in the town with a large black demijohn, which he carried away filled with liquor of the sort that makes men maniacs.

One afternoon, as I came down the valley, I heard the yelping of a dog, and, approaching the hut of the Basque, I beheld a sight that filled me with anger and distress.

The fellow had hung up the dog by the hind legs against the side of the house, and was beating him with a large knotted stick.

I did not stop to think much of consequences. I did as you or any man who has ever known a dog would have done. I jumped from the saddle, and drawing my knife as I ran, cut the animal down. Then I turned and faced the Basque.

I suppose he thought I was armed—which I was not—for he did not take up the gage of battle—but stared at me fiercely out of bloodshot eyes. The dog hobbled away to a short distance, shook off the riata with which its legs were ensnarled, and, crouching low, watched us.

"Come," I said in Spanish; "why should you kill your dog? You have drunk too much. To-morrow you will be glad that I saved his life."

He emitted a strange sound through his teeth and lips. It was very like the snarl of a wolf.

"If you do not care for the dog, will you sell him?" I asked.

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"No!" he replied with an oath, "I will not sell him; I mean to kill him!"

"Very well," I said, "if you do wish to take the animal's life, shoot him; but you shall not beat him to death."

The Basque turned towards the hut muttering imprecations against the dog and myself. When he came to the door he called to the dog,

"Demonio, come here!"

The animal eyed him, but did not move. Then the herder disappeared from view in the dark interior of the hovel.

I remounted, and continued on my way down the trail. I had gone about a hundred yards when suddenly there was a crashing in the chaparral behind, and I wheeled hastily round, to discover the dog. He had followed, evidently for the purpose of making my acquaintance, and to thank me for the rescue.

I called to him, and patted the side of my saddle, meaning that he should come where I might touch him. He started to obey, but as he approached nearer, my horse gave a violent snort, showed signs of fear, and began to shy away from him.

The act surprised me not a little, for the animal was a stolid old bronco that rarely started at anything, least of all at a dog. The dog stopped his advance and watched us, while I struggled to bring the horse nearer to him, and to calm his very evident terror.

But my efforts were unavailing, though I used whip and spur, and threw all my strength on the bridle. The horse would not allow the dog to touch him. For some strange cause he even trembled in his presence. At last I gave up the undertaking, and examined the Basque's companion from a little distance.

He was considerably larger than the average collie. I imagined that he must have had some Newfoundland, or, perhaps, St. Bernard blood—the sheep dogs of Australia are rarely of pure breed. His hair was short, curly, and black as night. He squatted on his haunches and looked steadily at me during the time that I was occupied in making this survey; and when at last I spoke to him, he lifted his ears a little, but made no other movement.

"Demon," I said, "is that your name—Demonio?"

"Let me tell you the story."

At first I thought that the name had been given him because he was dark in colour, as the popular belief paints an evil spirit. But a moment later, when my eyes rested on him, I saw, or I should say I felt, that there might be some further reason. I scarcely know how to describe the effect that his steady gaze produced upon me.

It was at first merely an impression that this dog was different from any of his species that I had ever known before; then a conviction that *something was wrong*; and then, an uncontrollable terror. These sensations followed one another in quick succession, almost in a flash; and without stopping to ask myself any questions, I gave my horse free rein and we plunged headlong down the trail.

Once again in the open plain, I tried to deceive myself into thinking that my terror had been only apprehension lest the Basque should come upon me from behind. The rapid descent of the twilight, and the peculiar behaviour of the horse, served to heighten the effect of this dread.

A few days later, when I passed the hut, the herder and his dog, in their usual attitudes, stared at me, sullen and silent. I looked closely at the dog's face, but could see nothing beyond keen animal intelligence.

Several months passed.

One morning, as I went out towards the corral, one of the men employed on the ranch came up to me and said:

"I believe that something has happened to that crazy Basque sheep-herder. His dog came here last night and would not go away."

"What, Demon?" I said, and as I spoke the animal came running up. I patted his head and talked to him, but he jumped uneasily about, as though he were anxious to be gone.

I suggested to the man that we should ride to the valley, and mounting, we followed the dog out into the road. He ran along several yards in advance of us, looking back occasionally to make sure that we were coming. When the valley was reached his pace slackened, and some distance from the hut he stopped and fell in behind us.

"He dreads a beating," said I.

From the trail we called to the hut, and receiving no answer we rode to the door and looked in.

There lay the Basque in the middle of the floor, his arms outstretched, and his head thrown back—dead.

An uncared-for corpse is always a disagreeable object to look upon, but something had happened to this one that rendered it impossible for me to give it more than one quick glance.

I hastily turned my horse's head away, and rode over toward the spot where the dog was crouching. The man, more resolute than I, dismounted, and went into the hut. When he came out again he said:

"I covered it over with one of those sheepskins, so it wouldn't scare anyone else. His bottle was lying near him, and I guess he must have drunk himself to death. That was probably done by coyotes, or maybe a mountain lion."

We rode to town, where we gave notice to the authorities of the man's death and also to several of his countrymen. In talking with one of the latter I asked what disposition would be made of the dead man's sheep and of his dog.

"The sheep," answered the man, "were not his; he had sold them. As to the dog, nobody wants the brute, I imagine."

"Why not?"

The man shrugged his shoulders, and looked askance at Demon, who had followed me.

"Very well," I said, "then I will take him."

No objection was made, and Demon passed into my possession.

My uncle had several hundred sheep, which were tended by an old native Australian and his son. I took Demon to them, and offered his services in the care of the flock. To my surprise they refused. I urged the matter, and finally demanded the ground of their opposition. At last the old man said:

"He looks like a sheep-killer."

This accounted for the refusal of the Basque shepherds to take the dog; they, too, suspected him. Knowing how prone such men were to superstitious prejudices, I would not allow the animal to be condemned without cause.

He shook his head. Then I asked if anyone had ever seen the dog prowling about at night, or behaving in a suspicious manner? Again he shook his head.

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One of the men employed on the ranch came up to me.

"It is all nonsense," I said, finding myself fairly forced into the position of the dog's defender.

"Now, I tell you," said the old shepherd, "I know that dog. I think that a bad dog. I will show you something."

He went into his hut and brought out two half-grown puppies—lively, wriggling little fellows—and put them down on the ground before Demon.

"You see," he said, "puppies always try to play with strange dogs—never afraid of them. Look! I told you he was a bad dog."

The infants waddled up to Demon, who approached them wagging his tail good-humouredly. The instant they got a good view of his face they whirled about and went off ki-yi-ing at a great rate of speed.

The performance struck me as amusing, and I laughed, but the old shepherd looked very grave.

"A bad dog," he reiterated slowly, "very bad."

"Well," I said, "I will take him myself, since you will not. But if I ever learn"—here I instinctively looked down into the dog's face, as though speaking to him—"if I ever learn that he has killed a sheep I shall have him shot."

The dog's eyes looked into mine with a keen, intelligent gaze; and I could not resist the belief that he had understood.

It is not improbable that my prejudice against the animal was even stronger than that of the shepherd's; but as I was an educated, reasoning man, proud of my freedom from every form of superstition, how could I bring myself to countenance such irrational fancies?

On the contrary, my duty seemed to lie in the opposite course, to defy this prejudice and to protect and defend the object at which it was levelled. Besides, I had come to feel a powerful curiosity with regard to this creature which, though apparently inoffensive, was so generally hated and feared.

What was it that inspired all other animals with such distrust of him? Not my horse alone, but every quadruped on the place manifested a very evident unwillingness to have him about. The other dogs would not associate with him. Yet he was not quarrelsome or bad-tempered.

One thing he did which, though not a serious fault, was often annoying. He had a habit of watching closely every motion of the person nearest him—usually myself. Sometimes I almost imagined that I could feel his eyes, when I did not see them, his gaze was so constant and intense.

Demon had been in my possession several weeks, when all at once I began to hear complaints about the killing of sheep. Every morning a fresh victim was found dead—now of one flock and now of another, yet all within a limited range.

They were all mutilated in the same way, and the work was plainly that of a dog practised in sheep-killing. As I had expected, suspicion immediately fell upon Demon; and one morning, when I came out of the house, I found a couple of herders waiting to see me.

They had no evidence against the dog, yet they demanded that he should be put to death. The injustice of it roused my indignation, and calling Demon to me I said:

"I want you to look at him. You say that a sheep was killed last night. Where is there any signs of blood about his jaws?"

One of them examined Demon's mouth, but found no mark of a slaughter. The other said:

"That does not prove anything. A regular sheep-killer does not spill much blood, and sometimes he learns to wash it off."

This sounded improbable to me, but I did not argue the matter.

"Very well," I said, "to-night Demon shall be shut up in the corral, and if a sheep is killed we shall know that he is not the guilty dog."

They shook their heads. "He will find some way of getting out of the corral," said one of them.

"Then he shall sleep in my room with me," I said, "and the doors and shutters shall be closed. Does that suit you?"

This arrangement seemed to satisfy them, and they went away.

That night I took Demon into my room, and gave him a mat in the corner for a bed. His only possible means of escape was by the door or the window. I locked the door and closed the venetian shutter and hooked it in place. Then I went to bed and almost immediately fell asleep.

In the morning, when I woke, Demon lay upon his mat apparently in sound slumber.

I began to dress. When I was nearly done my uncle rapped at the door.

"Have you Demon in there?" he called out.

"Yes," I answered opening the door.

He exhibited much surprise. "Another sheep was killed last night," said he.

"Well," I replied, "that merely proves what I said—that Demon is innocent."

"Yes, of course," said my uncle, looking doubtfully at the dog. He went over to the window and inspected the fastening.

"Impossible," he said.

"For him to open it?" I asked—"of course."

My uncle threw the shutters back and pointed significantly at the flower-bed below. The plants had been crushed down and the earth displaced, and round about were numerous dog-tracks.

"That was not there yesterday," said he.

My room was on the ground floor and from the window to the earth was only two or three feet. Had the shutters been open the dog might easily have climbed out and in again, but it had been locked all night.

I turned and looked at Demon. He was watching us steadily with the expression in his eyes that I knew and dreaded.

"Yes," I answered opening the door.

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My uncle made another examination of the fastening of the shutter. At last he said, "I am convinced that the sheep-killer is not Demon. There is no dog in existence who could manipulate that crooked hook to open the shutter. Those footprints were left there by some stray animal."

The conviction seemed inevitable, and I agreed with him. At the same time I was resolved to try the experiment again, and watch the dog more carefully.

That night I shut Demon in as before, and closed and fastened both door and shutter. There was a full moon, which made the landscape bright as day without, and it occurred to me, just as I was about to turn out my lamp, that I could throw open the upper section of the shutter and admit the light.

It fell in a broad white square directly across the mat where the dog lay, and after I got into bed I found that I could watch him easily, without turning my head upon the pillow.

Then I discovered that he was watching me. There was nothing unusual about that—only his eyes were strangely bright.

I tossed about in the bed for a time, but he never moved.

At last I determined to deceive him into the belief that I was asleep. I closed my eyes and presently by a careless movement drew the lace edge of the pillow-slip across my face. Thus I could watch him and yet conceal the fact that my eyes were open.

When I had lain in this position motionless for perhaps ten minutes, Demon suddenly lifted his head and turned it on one side. Plainly he was listening—for what I could not imagine. He put his head down and for another ten minutes did not move. Then gradually and noiselessly he rose to his feet and came towards the bed. A little distance away he stopped and listened again. Evidently he did not hear what he had expected, for after standing a moment he returned to his corner and lay down.

Suddenly I found the explanation of his strange conduct. He had listened to my breathing that he might determine if I slept.

Resolved to deceive him, if possible, I began to slowly lengthen my respiration, and to expel it with more sound and force.

The thing sprang at my throat.

At the end of a few minutes I saw that I was succeeding in my design. A second time he rose with perfect stillness and came to the bed. His face wore an expression of devilish cunning, so utterly foreign to his customary mien that under other circumstances I should have failed to recognise him. A swift flash of satisfaction in his eye showed that he thought me asleep, and he turned to the window to make his escape.

His motions were slow and cautious, reminding me of a cat rather than a dog. I had expected him to make some slight noise in unhooking the shutter, for I doubt if I myself, with my life in hazard, could have accomplished it inaudibly. But there was no sound to be heard in the room except that of my slow, steady respiration.

I think it must have taken him five minutes to draw the hook. Then the shutter was swung back quietly inch by inch, and his way was clear.

He stood for a moment with his forepaws upon the window-sill and looked back at me. As he did so, I felt again the same strange impression of terror that had overwhelmed me the first time my eyes met his in that lonely valley. For an instant I held my breath, and had he continued to look he must have discovered that I was not asleep. But now, with a sudden yet noiseless leap, he went out of the window—gone on his murderous quest.

It was several minutes before I ventured to move. At last I rose and went to the window. Far away, where the bright moonlight fell upon the side of the hill, I could see a small piece of darkness scudding swiftly along. It was Demon on his way to the sheep pastures.

I scarcely know what impulse sent me, but I went to the closet in my room, took down a large navy revolver, and when I got back into bed, slipped it underneath my pillow. I did not then, and I will not now, confess to any real fear of the dog—that is to say, physical fear.

There was dread—a vague indistinct horror—at something unexplainable that I seemed to see in his eyes. But had I really feared him I should have immediately closed the shutter, rendering his return quite impossible.

I lay still and watched for an hour. The nearest flocks, I knew, could be reached in a few minutes, and his return might be expected at any time. I drew the lace over my eyes again and listened for the sound that should indicate his approach.

Suddenly a great black head appeared in the window—without warning—materialised as it seemed out of the darkness of the night. In it two round red lights gleamed like coals of fire. The moon shone clear and full on his head, and I could plainly see the blood and foam with which his jaws were covered.

He climbed slowly into the room. Then, with an ingenuity that was even more than human, he drew the shutter back—noiselessly—and fastened it in place.

He gave one quick glance at me, and went over to his corner. Through the network of lace I watched him, while he licked the bloodstains from his feet and washed his face and neck, with the motions and attitudes of a cat.

I grew faint with the horror of it all, and at last forgot the part which I was playing, and ceased to counterfeit the respiration of one who sleeps. Even when Demon suddenly started up, looked at me and listened, I did not notice my mistake.

Then he came nearer to the bed, a few feet away, and glared at me out of those horrible eyes.

That was the moment in which I saw the thing and understood it all. You will not believe it. I don't ask that you should, but I saw through that creature's eyes down into the lost human soul that occupied its body.

It was the soul of a murderer—the destroyer of the drunken Basque in his lonely hovel, the slayer of the sheep—now, at last, throwing off all disguise.

With a strange half-animal and half-human cry the thing sprang at my throat, I threw my hand up and it missed its aim, the teeth closing only on the skin. The next instant I fired the revolver, and it rolled over dead.

The wound was not serious, but it left that ugly-looking scar. There is another scar that the experience left, which is probably much larger, if one could see it. I mean on my memory.

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THE JEW OF ROUDNIA.

I WAS travelling post-haste through Poland on most important business, and stopped for a change of horses at a little village called Roudnia. Here, as everywhere in this country, the population is divided into Jews and Catholics, and a church sacred to each religion lends dignity to the miserable collection of huts which constitutes a town in Poland.

While the horses were being unharnessed, I stretched my cramped limbs by a brisk walk up and down the bit of road before the post-station. Night was coming on and a singular rosy light appeared in the sky, against which the cross of the Catholic church loomed blackly.

"There is a fire in the town," said my driver laconically. "It is the house of a Jew."

"How do you know?" I asked in surprise.

"Ouf!" said the man, "I can smell the grease!" He was a Russian.

On a long weary journey any incident is a distraction.

"It is not far; I will walk on," I said. "You may follow when your horses are ready."

When I reached the scene of the fire, a great crowd had gathered. My driver was right; the house of a Jewish butcher was burning. The Jews were running in and out of the building, saving what they could carry in their arms. The Catholics stood with folded arms watching the progress of the flames. The butcher, himself, had gathered his family of frightened children together on one side of the road, and beside them, on a pallet stretched on the ground, he had laid his wife, with her new-born baby at her breast. He turned and looked at the burning house and his cries rent the air.

"Ah! God of Israel! What a loss!"

"We have saved a great deal," said a neighbour, pointing to the furniture piled on the road.

"But not everything—not everything!" wailed the Jew. "I have lost ——" he broke off with a sharp cry as his eyes rested on his family group by the roadside. "God of Israel! my mother! my old mother!"

The woman on the pallet rose with a groan. The cries of the children mingled with her sobs. A shudder ran through the crowd. Even the Catholics were stirred. A Jewess—yes! But a woman—an old woman.

The soldier lifted the figure of the woman high in the air.

The Jew took a step toward the burning house, but his wife, who had struggled toward him, fell into his arms.

"You shall not!" she cried, holding him fiercely.

"God of Israel!" shrieked the Jew, "she is paralysed! Who will save her? I will give half my fortune. I will give five roubles!"

Not a soul stirred.

"I will give half my fortune!" repeated the Jew, desperately.

A huge Cossack stepped from the crowd of Catholics. It was plainly to be seen that he had been drinking heavily.

"Pig!" he said, addressing the Jew, "where is your mother?"

"In the room to the left, my good kind friend! In the room where the fire has not yet reached, my noble friend!" whined the Jew.

"And you will give five roubles? Good. You hear?" turning to the crowd. There was a murmur of assent. He set his shoulders and took a long whiff of his pipe. "Peste! it looks warm in there!"

With a bound he disappeared in the smoke pouring from the open doorway. The crowd shivered in silence. Scarcely an instant passed before the huge figure of the Cossack struggled back through the blinding smoke, carrying a light burden in his great arms. His hair and beard were burned, and his face was blackened, but he had not removed his pipe from his mouth. The crowd broke into a wild cheer.

"There is the old woman," he said, placing her not ungently on the ground. "She has fainted—that is all! Give me my money!"

"What!" cried the Jew, his avarice reasserting itself now that fear was at rest. "At once, my good friend? Ah! that cannot be. I have not so much as that here with me. You must give me time to pay; when my affairs are settled; when I have rebuilt my house."

The Cossack advanced furiously upon him. From force of habit the Jew raised his arm to ward off a blow.

"Dog of a Jew!" thundered the soldier. "Do you think you can play with me? Do you think it was for pleasure I went into that fire? Give me the money!"

"I am a poor man," whimpered the Jew, "but the living God knows I am honest. I pay my debts."

He drew a greasy wallet from his breast, and fumbling in its depths, fished out a ragged piece of paper. As he held it out to the soldier the roof of the burning building fell with a crash, and a shower of sparks was scattered over the crowd. A great volume of smoke rose in the air and the flames leapt and danced like devils.

The Cossack glanced at the dirty piece of paper and, with an oath, flung it back in the Jew's face.

"Dog!" he thundered, "Thief! robber! One rouble——."

"The rest in good time," began the Jew. "In good——."

"One rouble!" roared the Cossack. "Is that a price for entering a burning house? Good! You shall see me enter it again for nothing."

With incredible swiftness, he picked up the helpless figure of the old paralytic, and, before the crowd could gather his intent, rushed toward the burning ruin. Nothing remained of the building but the door-frame outlined blackly against the vivid background of fire. The soldier sprang on the sill, with a roar like a beast in rage, lifted the figure of the woman high in the air, and, with all his strength, flung it from him unhesitatingly into the bed of fire.

It was so sudden, so awful, that not a sound escaped the crowd.

I was stunned by the horrible tragedy—sickened by the infernal picture still before me. The silent, horror-stricken crowd swaying and surging before that sea of fire, the huge figure of the Cossack grotesque and awful in silhouette, the agonised face of the Jewish woman, ghastly in the red light!

The voice of my driver reached me. I seemed to hear it from a great distance:

"Your Excellency, the horses are waiting."

To prevent unnecessary labour, and consequent disappointment, to any readers of this paper, who in the past have forwarded original stories for insertion, we would take this opportunity of saying that our arrangements for the provision of matter for "Short Stories" are complete for some time to come.

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THE OLD PEOPLE.

"A LETTER?"

"Yes, Monsieur, it is from Paris."

Good old Father Azan was proud that it came from Paris. Not I. Something seemed to tell me this dainty Paris letter, from Jean, Jacques Street, coming so unexpectedly and so early in the morning, would torment me and take up my entire day. That I was not mistaken you may see. Thus ran the letter:

"Would you be good enough to do something for me, my friend? Close your mill for the day and go immediately to Eyguières. Eyguières is a small village six or seven miles from your house—only a pleasant walk. When you reach there, ask for the Orpheline Convent. The first house beyond the convent is low, with green blinds and a garden in the rear.

"You must enter without knocking—the door is always open—and on entering call out, 'Good morning, good people, I am a friend of Maurice.' Then you will see two little old people. Oh, very, very old—as old as anyone you have ever seen. Seated in their great armchairs, they will hold out their hands to you. Greet them warmly, with all your heart, as though they belonged to you.

"Then begin to talk. They will talk to you of me alone. They will tell you of a thousand of my childish pranks, but you must not smile. Listen, but do not laugh—do you understand? They are my grandparents, two beings to whom I am all the world, and who have not seen me for ten years. Ten years! A long time! Yes; but what can I do? Paris holds me captive. As for them, they would come to me but for their age. If they tried to come they would die on the way.

"Happily, you are near them, my dear Miller, and in seeing you those pobr old folk will feel they have seen a part of me. I have often spoken to them of you, our good friendship that——."

"Plague take friendship!"

It was, indeed, a charming day, but not the day to walk along country roads. A violent, north-west wind blew, and, besides, it was too sunny to walk. When this tormenting letter arrived, I had already determined on a shelter between two rocks. There I planned to spend the whole day and bask in the sunlight like a lizard and listen to the sighing pines. But what was I to do? I closed my mill, growling and grumbling meanwhile, hid the key in a hole, took my stick and my pipe, and departed.

I arrived at Eyguières in about two hours. The village was deserted—everybody in the fields. In dusty elm trees by the roadside the grasshoppers hummed. Before the Mayor's office was a mule sunning himself, a flock of pigeons on the fountain in the churchyard, but no one to tell me of the Orpheline Convent.

Fortunately, an old woman appeared suddenly, sat down in the shadow of the doorway and began to spin. I told her what I wished to find, and, like a witch, she seemed all-powerful, for she raised her distaff and pointed. There before my very eyes was the convent. It was a large building, dull and black, and proudly above the porch, in a pointed arch, was an old red snag cross, with a short Latin inscription round it.

By the side of this building I saw a small house. Green blinds, a garden at the rear. I recognised it immediately and entered without knocking.

All my life I shall remember the long, clean, cool hallway, the rose-tinted walls, with their panels of flowers and faded violins, and the little garden at the end, with its wealth of colour. It seemed as though I had gone back to the time of Sedan, and stood in some old bailiff's house.

At the end of the hall, to the left, through a door half open, I could hear the tic-tac of a great clock, and the voice of a child—a school child—who, in reading, stopped at each syllable.

"When Saint—I—re—née—call—ed—out—I—was—the—wheat—of—the—mas—ter—I had—to—be—bro—ken—by the—teeth—of—these—an-i-mals."

Softly I approached and looked in.

In the quiet and half-light of the little room was an old man with red cheeks, and wrinkled to the tips of his fingers. There he was, asleep in his chair, his mouth open, his hands on his knees. At his feet was a little girl dressed in blue—a long cape and a little hood, the costume of the convent orphans—reading the life of Saint Irenée out of a great book as big as herself. This reading affected all alike.

The old man slept in his chair, the flies on the ceiling and the canaries in their cage by the window—all slept. The great clock kept up its tic-a-tac, tic-tac. Only a beam of sunlight moved; glinting through the closed shutters it danced and shone. In the midst of this calm the child gravely kept on her reading:

"Sud-den-ly-two-li-ons-pre-cip-i-ta-ted-them-selves-on-him, and-de-vour-ed-him."

Just then I entered.

If the lions that precipitated themselves on Saint Irenée had entered the room, greater consternation could not have been. The child screamed and let the book fall to the floor, the canaries and the flies woke up, the clock struck, and the old man, sitting up with a start, stared.

As for me, I stood on the threshold, a little disconcerted, but said in a clear voice: "Good day, good people. I am a friend of Maurice."

Oh, if you could have seen the old man—if you could have seen him come towards me with his arms stretched out, and fold me close, shake my hand and wander round the room, saying, "Oh, my! Oh, my!" All the wrinkles in his face smiled. He blushed and stammered, "Ah, monsieur and monsieur!" Then going to the door he called, "Mamette!"

A door opened, and the sound of a light, quick, mouse-like footfall in the passage—it was Mamette. Nothing could be prettier than this old lady, with her high shell-comb, her carmelite dress, and carrying in her hand her lace handkerchief, according to the old-fashioned custom, to do me honour.

How beautiful! How tenderly beautiful! They two resembled each other. With the aid of the comb and gown the little old man might have been mistaken for Mamette herself. Only Mamette's face showed the trace of sorrow. She was more wrinkled. Evidently she had shed many tears during her life. But, like him, she had a little orphan, with the inevitable blue cape, by her side. It was a touching sight to see these old people protected, as it were, by the little orphan tots.

On entering, Mamette began to make me a deep curtsey, but one word from her husband cut the bow in two. "He is a friend of Maurice." Then she began to tremble, she cried, lost her handkerchief, blushed, grew redder and redder, even more than he. These poor old people. At the slightest emotion the few drops of blood left in their veins mounted to their cheeks in a second.

"Quick, quick, a chair," she said to the little girl at her side.

"Open the blinds," said the old man to the child at his knee.

And each taking my hand they led me to the window to scan my face lineament by lineament. Then, between them in their armchairs, I seated myself in a folding chair, and with the children behind us the questions began.

"How is he? What is he doing? Why doesn't he come to see us? Is he happy?" etc., etc., for hours.

As for me, I answered as best I could, giving what details I knew concerning my friend, and inventing others, of which I was ignorant, even going as far as to declare his windows faced the best way, and what coloured paper he had on his walls.

"The paper of his bed-room?"

"It is blue, madame. Light blue, with garlands."

"Truly!" interrupted the dear little old lady. And turning to her husband she added, "Isn't he a great child!"

"Yes, indeed he is!" was the enthusiastic response. And all the time I talked it was between shakings of the head, little laughs, winkings of the eye, a manner of quiet understanding. Or, perhaps, the old gentleman would say, "Speak louder! She is somewhat hard of hearing." And then she would interrupt and whisper, "Just a little louder, please. He doesn't hear very well."

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Then I would raise my voice and each would thank me with a smile, and with these smiles they would search my eyes for a trace of the picture of their Maurice. As for myself, I was too much moved to recall his face. It seemed vague, veiled, almost unrecognisable, as though I saw my friend smile on me through a mist.

Suddenly the old man got out of his chair. "But think, Mamette, perhaps he has not breakfasted!"

And Mamette, in her astonishment, raised her arms in the air, replied: "Not breakfasted? Mercy me!"

Believing they were still thinking of Maurice, I hastened to assure them that their good grandson never fasted beyond the noon hour. But no, indeed, it was of me they spoke, and it was touching to see their hurry when they learned I had not eaten.

"Quick! the tablecloth, children! The table in the middle of the room. The Sunday linen and the plates decorated with flowers. And don't waste any time, if you please, but hurry!"

And, indeed, no time could have been wasted, for before one could hardly turn round breakfast was there, served.

"Only a little breakfast," said Mamette, as she escorted me to the table. "You see, you will have to eat alone, for we ate ours earlier this morning."

Poor old people. At what hour must they have risen, and already breakfasted!

Mamette's little breakfast consisted of a small glass of milk, some dates, and a crisp white roll. It was enough to feed her and her canaries for at least a week.

There was great indignation round the table. The little blue-caped children nudged each other and whispered, while the canaries in the bottom of their cage seemed to say, "Oh, see that gentleman eating a whole roll!"

But, indeed, I did eat it all; and, meanwhile, without my kind host's perception, I furtively looked round this bright, peaceful room, which seemed to breathe a perfume from the past. I could not keep my eye off two little beds. I could imagine these two beds, almost like cradles, in the early morning, their fringed curtains still closed. The clock strikes three—the hour when old people waken. "Art thou asleep, Mamette?" "No, dear." "Isn't Maurice a good lad?" "Oh, yes, such a good lad!" I could seem to hear the conversation while I looked at those two little beds placed side by side.

While thus musing, a great commotion was going on at the other end of the room before the cupboard. He was trying to reach the very top shelf, where there were some brandied cherries which had been waiting ten years for Maurice, and which he now wanted opened for me. In spite of Mamette he would get those cherries himself, and, standing on a chair to the great terror of his wife, he tried to reach up.

Can you imagine the picture—the old man trembling and reaching up, the little blue-caped charity children holding the chair, and Mamette back of all, breathless, her arms held out? And from the open cupboard a great perfume of bergamot. Oh, it was charming!

Finally, after much effort, he brought out of the cupboard the famous jar and also an old silver cup, all embossed. It was the cup Maurice had when a little child. They would feed me with those cherries—Maurice had so loved them; and when serving me the old man whispered in my ear, with an appreciative air: "You ought to be very happy to eat these. My wife preserved them. You are going to have something fine."

Alas! his wife had made them, but she had forgotten to sugar them! That was only natural. One becomes childish as old age creeps on. The cherries were atrocious, my poor Maurice, but that did not prevent my eating them, just the same, without the least quiver of an eyelash.

. . . . . .

The repast finished, I rose to take leave of my hosts. They would have gladly kept me longer to talk of their Maurice, but day was darkening, my mill was far distant, and I had to go.

The old gentleman rose with me and said: "Mamette, my coat. I wish to escort him to the square." I felt sure Mamette thought at the bottom of her heart it was too cold for him to go out, but she said nothing.

Only when she helped him put his arms into the sleeves of his coat—a nice coat, Spanish tobacco in colour, with pearl buttons—I heard her say softly: "Thou wilt come back before it is too late, wilt thou not?" And he, with a little air of resistance, replied: "He, he; I do not know—perhaps."

And then they looked laughingly at each other, and the little children laughed to see them laugh, and in their corner the canaries laughed, too, in their own way. Indeed, the odour of the cherries had affected all of them a little.

Night was falling when we left, the grandfather and I. The little maid followed us afar to lead him back. But he did not see her, and was proudly walking by my side, his arm in mine, like any other man.

Mamette, beaming from her doorway, shook her head proudly, as though to say: "All the same, my old husband walks as well as the best of them."

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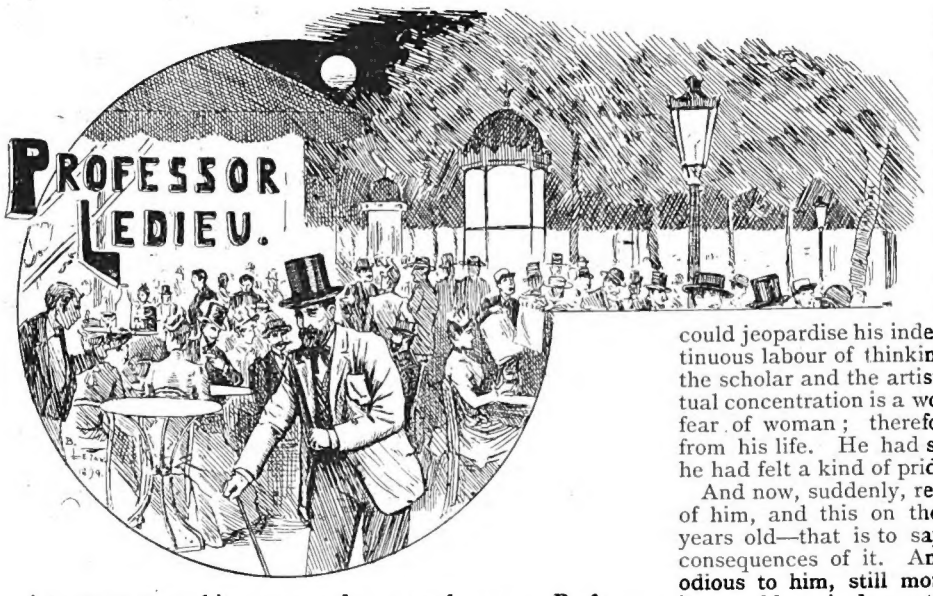

ACCORDING to his custom for several years, Professor Ledieu on Sunday evening, a few minutes before seven, turned the handle of the door that leads into the restaurant Cherbois, Place de la Sorbonne, Paris.

After a glorious day the sun was setting behind the little hills of Meudon, purpling with the last rays the gables of the houses of the square and the old dome, which glistened under the pure azure of the heavens. All Paris had been rushing into the country since morning, and was now returning in haste before nightfall. Everywhere the crowd, moving from the circumference to the centre, were filling the highways with bright toilets, gay countenances, ringing laughter and bundles of flowers, bringing into the depths of the old musty streets the assurance of spring and the perfumes of the country.

With a bow to the maid behind the bar, Professor Ledieu turned to the left and seated himself at a table placed in a corner beside the window, which was kept vacant for him each Sunday. After giving his hat to Leon, he sat down abruptly, threw his pamphlets on the table with a frown, and, when the waiter placed the bill of fare for the day in his hands, he perused it with a gloomy stare, as if he was reading there his sentence of death.

When Leon came to help him in making up his menu, he agreed silently with all the opinions of the waiter, but without responding this time with the benevolent smile with which he was in the habit of thanking him, and, as Leon disappeared, crying, "A printanier for one!" he murmured, "What can have happened to monsieur le professor this evening?"

However firm his will, what man is there who has not had his hour of discouragement? However plainly his way may be traced before him, who has not asked himself once in his life, "Have I followed my true path?".

This same day Professor Ledieu had entered his forty-eighth year. Attracted by the glorious sun, he had gone to take his Sunday walk into the woods of Meudon. By what odd reaction did it happen that all the joys of Nature condensed themselves into a profound sadness in his soul? How was it that this intellect, so well balanced, instead of pursuing the laborious dreams that made the enchantment of his whole life, should suddenly lay him flat in the groove of human realities?

Stopping to think for a moment, he had looked around him. Here and there, in the country, people were coming and going, laughing and chatting, families overflowing with little children, groups of noisy young people, all had been passing before his eyes, crossing him without even giving a single look in his direction, and he only had been alone.

Yes, alone with phantoms—Tiglath-Pilezer, Bel-Kat-Irassu, Sennacherib, Salmanazar, Semiramis—phantoms that haunt, penetrate, and envelop him. And now the intensity of the life that surrounds him makes this intimacy of his with the dead appear sinister to him. He is thinking that in a few hours he will be sitting alone at dinner, will then return to his obscure lodgings, will light his lamp, and there, too, will be alone in raising up his spectres; and for the first time in his life this abandonment weighs upon him, and he complains, and he suffers from that which till now he had considered the chief food of life—solitude.

He had so valiantly defended his beloved solitude. He had so resolutely banished from his path all that could jeopardise his independence and disturb him in that continuous labour of thinking which is the supreme pleasure of the scholar and the artist. The great enemy of this intellectual concentration is a woman. Therefore he had an instinctive fear of woman; therefore he had pitilessly eliminated her from his life. He had so far escaped from every chain, and he had felt a kind of pride in the fact.

And now, suddenly, regret for his misogamy took possession of him, and this on the very day when he was forty-eight years old—that is to say, when it was too late to escape the consequences of it. And now his beloved solitude became odious to him, still more odious from the fact that it was irreparable. And now the longing for feminine tenderness, for the family life, sprang up in him, held him fast, the more alluring that it could no longer be realised.

This thought seized him with irresistible force; it took entire possession of him. He walked with it the whole day, gloomy and despondent, under the blue sky and amid the verdure. He brought it back in the evening with him to Paris. He sat down with it at his solitary table at the restaurant Cherbois. It absorbed him to such an extent while he was eating his "printanier" that he did not see a new group of guests enter and take their places opposite him. But Leon having replaced the "printanier" by a "gigot Bretonne," as the professor was about to swallow the first mouthful, and had raised his eyes mechanically, the picture presented to him was such that he let fall his arm and fork, and remained open-mouthed, not tasting a morsel.

The group which thus riveted the attention of Professor Ledieu consisted of four persons—husband, wife, and two childen; evidently a family belonging to the class of little Parisian shopkeepers, who dine at the restaurant on Sundays, in order to give a holiday to the woman who does the cooking for the household the other days of the week.

She was pretty, this young mother. Her beautiful chestnut hair framed a rather refined face, somewhat pale, with irregular features, but lit up by two large laughing eyes. She had the roguish, self-possessed air of the Parisienne out for a holiday, as indefatigable in pleasure as in labour. With a graceful movement her hands rose to a level with her head to take off her hat, throwing her fine figure into relief as she bent backward, while the two children, a little girl of about seven, and a boy somewhat younger, clung to her. While replying to the questions of her husband—a brisk, squat, little fellow, with waxed moustache, hair brushed back from his forehead, and the gait of a corporal—who was asking her opinion on the bill of fare, she took off the children's hats and arranged them at the table; and soon the whole family being seated, the boy near the mother, the girl beside the father, the dinner began with a noise of dishes and forks, with laughter and the chirping of children—in fine, with an air of noisy merriment that completed the melancholy of the professor.

It was not enough that during the entire day the thought of his isolation had pursued and tortured him. It was still necessary that the spectacle of the happiness he had so long disdained, which he regretted now and to which he could never henceforward aspire, should be paraded under his very eyes. And yet these people were not very fortunate. It only required a glance to tell that their life was laborious and hard, their toil incessant, without hope of fortune possible. Whence did they derive that fine temper, that contented air, that joy,

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if not from mutual love and the common affection for the little beings sprung from them—in a word, from the family life?

Thus was clearly demonstrated to him the natural law he had disowned. How could he have taken so long to comprehend that man is not made solely for the purpose of burrowing in tombs and deciphering puzzles, and that there are other means of pleasure in this world besides adding a name to the incomplete list of kings of Nineveh or a date to Assyrian chronology? He saw it well now. The true sense of life was revealed to him.

As to the joys one has lost, there remains at least the memory of having tasted them. But are there any regrets more bitter than those for a happiness we might have enjoyed, and yet have voluntarily deprived ourselves of? Wifely tenderness, the laughter of children, household pleasures, mental rest, and relaxation—what a clear idea he had now of all this! How he felt its value, and how he understood that for him it was all over, over for ever!

"Monsieur does not eat his mutton!"

Professor Ledieu raised his saddened eyes to Leon, who was watching him with anxious solicitude, then lowered them immediately on his plate.

Absorbed in the contemplation of his neighbours and by the painful thoughts the sight of them suggested, he had remained without eating, fork in hand, for now nearly half an hour. A pale layer of grease had formed on the surface of the "gigot Bretonne." It looked like a kind of frozen pond in his plate, from which the meat emerged as a barren isle and the beans like little scattered rocks. Still he resisted the attempts of Leon to have the whole re-warmed. Cold mutton was good enough for a poor wretch, deserted by everybody, who was never to know the delights of a comfortable home, the attentions and caresses of a loving wife; and he began to eat with a kind of fury.

"I would never have to slap his ears if you did not give him his own way always."

At this moment the voice of the little girl was raised—

"I say, Robert, will you stop?"

It seems that young Robert was not disposed to yield to the entreaties of his sister, for, after a few minutes, the latter cried:

"Papa, make Robert stop; he is kicking me under the table. Please speak to him."

"Come, come, Robert, be quiet," said the mother, and she resumed her conversation with her husband.

But the amiable Robert did not appear to have more respect for the maternal commands than for the entreaties of his sister. Having assured himself by a glance that his father was not attending to him, and yielding to that need of motion which children feel at table when it is impossible for them to eat more, he continued the sport that amused him, and stretched his legs energetically in the direction of those of his sister.

Unhappily for him, the latter, foreseeing the attack, had drawn her chair back out of his reach. The clever child, seeing that he could no longer reach her without projectiles, found nothing better to do than to steep his hand in the coloured water in his glass, and sprinkle his little sister, who uttered loud cries.

"Papa, he has stained my dress."

The father, furious at being interrupted, turned toward his son and darted a menacing glance at him.

"Wait a little," he shouted, "you are going to have such a whipping as you never had in your life!"

The criminal, seeing already the paternal hand suspended over his head, made a terrified movement, when, unfortunately, his arm encountered the glass of coloured water. The glass and the child lost their balance at the same moment, the glass spilling all the liquid it contained on the mother's gown, the child catching at the table cloth and dragging with it to the floor bottles and glasses, plates and dishes, sauces and viands. Heavens, what a noise! The waiters ran up; the mother wipes herself; the children roar, and the father swears like a trooper, while young Robert is being picked up.

"You young scoundrel," shouts the father.

The child bellows louder than ever. The mother in fury interferes and says to her husband:

"It is your fault, too!"

"How, my fault?"

"Yes, your fault!"

"Well, that's rather good, that is!"

"If you had not frightened him, this would never have happened."

"Ought I to let him behave so abominably without minding it?"

"That's no reason why you should knock him down. No one ought to be such a brute with a baby like that."

"What! knock him down? Why, I haven't even touched him."

"Oh, you might restraint ourself a little!"

"I would never have to slap his ears if you did not give him his own way always."

"Oh, yes, of course, it's all my fault now."

"Yes, it is your fault."

"Do you dare say that to my face?"

Professor Ledieu lost nothing of the scene, and, in proportion as it developed, the smile spread again over his lips. Now, without ceasing to listen, he was eating his asparagus (in oil, according to the advice which Leon had given him).

His neighbours attacked each other with increasing acrimony. The replies exchanged became more bitter, and in this oratorical struggle it was easy to see the husband would not get the upper hand.

His wife bombarded him with words so rapidly that he no longer found an answer. She had extinguished his fire.

"And for all that, what pleasure have I ever had in my my life? Nursing children, cooking, a maid-of-all-work, indeed."

"Ah! it was my luck to have met with such a good-for-nothing as you! And monsieur complains! Well, if you are not content, you have only to say so."

The husband, annoyed at seeing himself the object of all eyes, tried to make her at least lower her voice. "Humbug! Little I care who hears me!"

A blush mounted to the face of the poor man, who was rapidly losing his self-possession under the scathing sarcasm of his wife's words.

The dispute between husband and wife lasted through the dessert, which the professor was enjoying with ever-increasing cheerfulness.

Then Professor Ledieu, having first of all paid his bill and given Leon a tip so unusually large as to make that functionary open his eyes, replaced his book and pamphlets under his arm, left the Restaurant Cherbois and directed his steps to the Rue de Monsieur le Prince, thinking with delight that in the calm solitude of his little apartment, all encumbered with books, he would again find Tiglath-Pilezer, Assur-Bani-Pal, and Queen Semiramis.

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AUNT CAROLINE'S WEDDING PRESENT.

YES, we were really married.

The clergyman, with impressive solemnity, announced that we were now one, and sanctioned our union with the blessing of the church. He shook my hand, and the tears stood in his eyes as he wished me unending happiness. He kissed Eleonore, whom he had christened twenty years before, and repeated again: "God bless you, my dear child!"

Then came the wedding-guests, one after the other, to congratulate us. There was quite a procession.

The sixth person in the procession was Aunt Caroline. She is Eleonore's aunt, but I am quite as fond of her as if she were my own. She is the best of creatures, always ready to come when you need her, and quite as willing to stay away when she fancies that her society might be burdensome. She is one of those generous, patient aunts who in winter always have on hand a store of goodies for hungry nieces and nephews; and in summer are ever ready to take charge of a particularly restless schoolboy or girl, whose exuberant vacation spirits render him or her an annoyance to the quiet home circle. In a word, Aunt Caroline is a noble example of what an aunt really ought to be.

"Dear Felix—Dear Eleonore," she said as she clasped our hands, "my wedding present is so cumbersome that I arranged to have it sent directly to your house, where you will find it when you return from your bridal tour. It will welcome you to your new home, and I trust it may give you much pleasure, and daily remind you of your old Aunt Caroline."

A dozen times a day during our journey we spoke of Aunt Caroline's present, and tried to guess what it might be. Eleonore was certain that it was a handsome book-case, while I maintained with equal confidence that it must be a superb bronze ornament.

At last, after fourteen October days of crimson-tinted forests, and deep blue bays, enchanting sunsets, and cosy evenings beside sparkling hearth-fires in comfortable hotels—after two weeks of perfect enjoyment, we returned to the charming little home which had been prepared for us, and which was henceforth to be our haven of happiness.

I kissed Eleonore when I helped her from the carriage, and murmured: "Welcome home, my dear wife."

She returned my caress rather hastily, and, running past me into the house, said: "Now we shall see what it is."

Alas! we learned only too soon. Martha, our little maid-of-all-work, had illuminated the little drawing-room for our reception. The handsome swinging lamp above the centre table—a present from Uncle Augustus—was lighted. Red wax candles burned brightly on each of the two bronze candelabra—Uncle Christopher's present—on the mantel; while two lighted student lamps, likewise other wedding gifts, stood on the piano. The light from all these served to illumine, and to direct our glances the moment we entered the room toward, Aunt Caroline's present, which hung directly opposite the door. It was an atrociously painted representation of the parable of the Prodigal Son, and looked as if it might have originated in a manufactory of "curiosities." Its true origin I never learned, although I had ample opportunity to study it.

It is quite certain, however, that dear Aunt Caroline, knowing my own and Eleonore's fondness for pictures, and with her heart overflowing with benevolence and affection, had purchased the huge canvas at some auction, paying for it a good round sum, and consoling herself for the extravagance with thoughts of the pleasure the picture would give us.

The canvas measured eight feet by ten feet. The frame was a broad, gilded affair; the composition itself absurd in the extreme. In the middle foreground a group of figures in gala attire represented the returned prodigal, his parents, and the guests invited to celebrate the return. On a sort of raised gallery in the background were a number of figures with cymbals, dancing and singing. All these persons were in a kind of pillared hall, to the left of which was an abject-looking individual in tattered garments, feeding some swine with ears of corn. To the right of the hall was an Oriental butcher with a Turkish scimitar, slaughtering the fatted calf.

Aunt Caroline confided to me afterwards that it was because the canvas contained really three pictures instead of only one that she decided to secure it, adding with a triumphant smile:

"You see, my dear nephew, you have the entire allegory on one canvas!"

And there it hung—taking up almost one entire wall of the room in which we had decided Eleonore should spend the most of her time.

We surveyed the monstrosity in silence; in silence listened to Martha's admiring comments on the "perfectly lovely painting"; then we went to inspect the dining-room and my study. We spent the evening in the latter cosy chamber.

. . . . . .

But Eleonore could not at all times use the study as a sitting-room, especially when I had business callers. At such times the poor child would bravely conquer her aversion to the "Prodigals"—thus she designated both the bipeds and quadrupeds in the picture—and, with her back turned resolutely upon them, would sit in the drawing-room until my visitors had departed.

We have a large circle of acquaintances. Of course, they all called on us, and Eleonore said she always felt as if the "Prodigals" helped her "do the honours." Indeed, the picture seemed to receive the larger share of our visitors' attention. Some of Eleonore's more intimate friends asked her why she had hung such a "very large picture" in our small drawing-room. Some, who considered it impolite to make such remarks, maintained a discreet silence; while those who thought it "good form" to talk about pictures, and to pretend a familiarity with art, would inquire if "that large painting was the work of a British artist," or remark that it reminded them of something similar which they had seen at the Academy—or somewhere.

Then there were some who would observe that the same subject had been treated in so many different ways—that it was very "instructive," and so on. There was still another class of art critics. It was composed of those who knew nothing about pictures, but who were quite ready to admire anything the moment they found out that somebody else admired it.

Now, there was no one in our village who was as familiar with really good pictures as myself. When any of my neighbours wanted to buy a painting, or engraving, he first consulted me; consequently the fact that I had the "Prodigal Son" hanging on my wall was sufficient to convince, even those of our friends who really thought the picture an abominable daub, that there must be "something in it"; and they exerted themselves manfully to discover this something.

"How very natural those swine are!" one would say.

"Just see what brilliant colouring in those clouds!" another.

"How repentant the 'Prodigal' looks," a third would remark, with the air of a *connoisseur*.

"It is really quite interesting to see those ancient fashions. Now, that tunic is really quite picturesque," and so on, until my poor little wife actually grew to despise these well-meaning art critics.

When I came home in the evening, and found Eleonore almost worn out, and would inquire tenderly what wearied her, she would sigh, "Oh, those 'Prodigals.'" And really, it was almost unendurable. But we could not offend dear Aunt Caroline—whose admiring gaze always hung with devouring interest on the mammoth canvas every time she visited us—by cutting it in pieces, burning it, or hanging it in the cellar.

However, after everybody had called, and had been called on in return, there came a season of comparative peace, during which Eleonore went to pay a two days' visit to an old school friend.

During her absence I had the upholsterer and two of his men to come and remove the "Prodigals" into the dining-room; and when Aunt Caroline, on her next visit, missed the picture from its accustomed place, she seemed quite down-

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hearted. I, however, boldly declared that the light in the dining room was much better, and that the subject—feasting—was more suitable for a dining-room than a drawing-room.

Dear Aunt Caroline! She had so much faith in my reputation as an art *connoisseur* that, notwithstanding her disappointment, she said I was quite right to move the picture.

Now, thought I, with self-gratulatory feeling, Eleonore can receive her callers in comfort.

But I reckoned without my "Prodigals."

Although the picture gave us less annoyance in its present position, we did not become reconciled to it. Far from it! but as I sat with my back toward it during meals, and Eleonore had only a side view, it was not so constantly obvious as it had been, and when the warm weather came, we covered it with gauze—on account of the flies!

It happened that the distinguished botanist, Doctor S——, visited our town during the holidays.

There were no flies at that time. Our guest was a most amiable man, and the friends whom we had invited to dine with him did their best to help entertain him.

During the soup he related a highly amusing adventure he had had in Egypt. When Martha removed his plate, he looked up—the "Prodigals" were directly opposite him—and, well-bred though he was, he could not help a look of wondering surprise at sight of such a travesty on art. He paused, stared at the picture, then, turning toward my wife, stammered confusedly:

"I—I beg pardon, madam, but—really I forget—ah, yes—what a marvellous painting—ah—ah——!"

Naturally every glance was directed toward the object which had so confused the learned gentleman.

Eleonore declared that from the moment his eyes fell on the "Prodigals" the doctor talked to her as he would to a child; and she is certain that it is because of that unfortunate canvas that he did not pay us a farewell call, notwithstanding my assurance that he was hastily summoned away by a telegram.

A few days later Eleonore went to visit her mother, and while she was gone, I again sent for the upholsterer and his men, and had the picture removed to my study. To do this, I was obliged to take down about two hundred books, together with the shelves.

The light here was execrable, but that did not matter. I placed my desk so that my back was toward it, and commended my visitors of taste to the mercy of their good angels. On New Year's Day Aunt Caroline dined with us, and you may imagine her surprise when, seated in the chair Doctor S—— had occupied, she looked up and found the picture gone. She didn't say a word, however.

"We hung your picture—your lovely picture, dear aunt—in my study," I answered casually, adding, in my desperation, "I intend to exhibit it to my Sunday class."

The dear old soul did not say anything, nor was she offended; but she appeared so melancholy that I was conscience-striken. Before I went to bed I tried to make amends for the detestable story I had told Aunt Caroline. I wrote to a friend of mine, and invited him to bring his Sunday class on the following Thursday evening and take tea with us. The invitation was accepted.

I received my friend and his scholars in the drawing-room. I asked the little fellows all sorts of questions about their studies, and Eleonore showed them our photographs. At last came the welcome summons to tea, after which I invited the children into my study to see the picture of the "Prodigal Son."

The lamps were placed in the most favourable positions. The youngsters ranged themselves in a row in front of the picture, I took my station on one side, my friend on the other. I cleared my throat, and began in a didactic tone:

"This picture, my dear children, is partly allegorical, partly realistic. These two rows of columns on either side of the centre divide the different eras of the parable. Here on the left you see the prodigal, hungry and wretched, sharing the swine's food—as the Scriptures tell us. Here in the background you see them singing and dancing, rejoicing over the return of the prodigal. Here, again, on the right is the butcher in the act of killing the fatted calf."

While I delivered this highly-instructive lecture my friend pointed with a ruler toward the designated objects.

The silence which followed my remarks was actually oppressive. At last one little fellow, Frank Diegel, the butcher's son, feeling that something ought to be said, stammeringly asked:

"Be them Berkshire pigs?"

The laughter which followed the general oppressiveness was wonderfully hearty, and, the clock striking nine soon afterward, Eleonore and I gave thanks for our release.

These are only a few of the many annoyances which Aunt Caroline's well-meant wedding present brought upon us.

Fortunately, there were some very warm days in March—quite warm enough to bring to life two flies in my study. Once I should have put an end to their premature existence. I did not do so now. I fetched the gauze veil and draped it securely over the Prodigals. The next day Aunt Caroline called. Said I to her when she came into the study:

"Have you noticed, dear aunt, how very early the flies have made their appearance this spring?"

Aunt Caroline had not noticed.

I should not be adhering strictly to the truth were I to say that we were not perfectly happy in our little home. We were—even though there was hardly a forenoon, afternoon, or evening that one of the Prodigals—either the son, one of his parents, the butcher or one of the swine—did not somehow mix in our conversation. It was not for this—though it helped somewhat—that, when summer brought my holiday, we determined to spend it in the New Forest.

Those were enchanting days!

Eleonore embroidered, sketched, and read to her heart's content, while I wrote diligently at a new book I had begun.

Thus we passed six delightful weeks with never a thought of the Prodigals, when one morning, Fate, in the person of the postman, brought me a newspaper.

"Are you Mr. Trubury, from Bromley?" he inquired.

"I am."

"Then here's something that may interest you," he added, pointing to a paragraph in the paper. I read:

"Yesterday, in Bromley, a fire consumed the residences of Miss Surrey and Mr. Felix Trubury. The loss is partly covered by insurance."

I summoned my poor little wife, to whom I communicated as gently as possible our great loss.

We began at once to prepare for our return journey; and as our train would not leave until the afternoon, I wired a friend for further particulars of the fire.

The answer came as we were leaving the hotel:

"Fire started in the Surreys' house. Unfortunately, very little saved."

As I concluded this rather depressing message, Eleonore clasped my hand in both her own, and whispered assuringly: "We have each other, dear Felix, we shall not be poor—we have each other—and our love."

A few hours later we were in Bromley. As we drew near to the station, Eleonore leaned toward me, and said, smiling through her tears:

"Felix, dear, we have one comfort."

"What is it, love?"

"We are rid of those detestable swine."

"That's so," I assented. "There is never a misfortune that has not some recompense."

I had sent a word to a friend to meet us at the station. He had not come alone. There were several sympathetic acquaintances with him.

"It was so late," said my friend, referring to the fire, "and so sudden. There was a furious wind——"

"But," interrupted another friend, "one thing will give you great pleasure."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Eleonore expectantly. "What, pray?"

"You have to thank Frank Diegel's courage for it. When all hope of saving the house was gone, he and several of my Sunday scholars broke open the shutters of your study window, and Frank bravely entered the burning dwelling and cut the large painting from the frame. That was the only thing saved!"

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THE MAN MY SISTER MARRIED.

SUMMARY—Chapters I. to IX.

The story is told by Violet (Letty) Lombard, who, at the opening, is living at Galveston, U.S.A. with her grandfather Enos Lombard, Liz the coloured servant, Justina her old nurse, and her Aunt Marg, who has been the recipient of mysterious letters, post-marked New Orleans, necessitating a fortnight's absence from home. John Scott, who married Katherine, Violet's step-sister, a very beautiful girl, pays for Violet's board and lodging, and has just decided that she is to go to a convent in New Orleans. On the strength of information gained from the torn pieces of one of Aunt Marg's letters, and curious to solve the mystery, Violet so arranges that she goes to New Orleans a day earlier, and that she stops at the Hotel Gilbert. Through a crack in the wall, she sees what happens in the next room to hers. John Scott, Captain Dana—an old friend from Galveston—Aunt Marg, and others are sitting in judgment upon a Mexican, Antonio, who has, it transpires, assisted in the seizure of Scott's wife, and of Dana's wife and daughter, and whose terrible crime has been brought to light by Yara, a spy. Antonio is compelled to end his life by taking poison, with his dying words laying the blame upon one Xarras.

Letty goes to the convent in the morning, and during her schooldays there clandestinely meets James Gregory, who is introduced as the son of a friend of her grandfather's. On her way home again, some months later, with her chaperone Miss Wilson, Colonel Dean Gregory, James's brother, introduces himself. After that, Letty sees a great deal of James, and at length promises to elope with him. Whilst waiting for him to come, she overhears Dean Gregory telling a friend of a plot whereby he has won James over, and has made it probable that John Scott's money will come to himself instead of to Letty. She consequently refuses to have anything to do with James.

* * * *

CHAPTER X.

THE next morning Bruce brought me a kind little note from Mr. Scott, telling me I had better not mention my visit to him, but to let my grandfather think the world itself had found out its mistake. He was so wise and helpful, and I felt I had one friend I could trust; and dear me! the resolves to do better that I made that day; and I even caught myself singing. After tea, when grandfather was sitting in the porch, I went out and offered to read him his paper. His sight is poor, and Aunt Marg's voice is too weak for her to read aloud.

"It'll last one reading," he grunted, giving up the paper unwillingly; but after a week, when I persevered in being accommodating, he surprised me one night by going down to his pet rose-bush and cutting off a handful of blossoms. These he handed me with quite a courtly air. My voice choked a bit when I thanked him and I forgot he had called me a living conscience.

Sunday morning, when John Scott's carriage surprised grandfather in his shirt-sleeves in the garden, he was vastly astonished, and I saw him peeping behind the blind as I drove away in great state with those shrouded sisters. Mrs. Scott was kind, but never have I seen such a statue of ice as Mrs. Gregory was. She even suggested that I had better take her place, for John might not wish me to ride backward, and other pleasant feminine flings that I bore with marvellous patience and silence. I could feel the eyes just scorching my back as I sat in that pew, but I held my head high and looked haughtily round at the wondering members.

John and I had the same hymn-book, but not a note would I sing. I had not repented so far as that, in spite of the best resolutions in the world. I watched his profile during the service, and began to think him handsome. I wondered of what he was thinking with that far-away look in his eyes. He insisted on my walking home with him, knowing, I suppose, the misery I endured coming in the carriage. I talked very meekly all the way, but I did admit that the new alto sang very flat. Then he laughed in that quiet way.

"What a very human Letty you are," he said; "and you wouldn't sing either—not a note."

"I am out of practice," I answered, and he only smiled the more. He seems to read one's very thoughts.

On Monday morning, although she was grumpy and cross, I helped Liz fold the clothes, and made a cake for tea.

Just about then old Captain Dana was taken very ill, and one day I asked Aunt Marg if I might cook something nice for him.

"Of course you may, dear," she said; "isn't this your home? I would go with you if I were strong enough."

I stooped and kissed her, though I am not much given to affection, but she did look so sweet and frail. I wish she had not kept me at arm's length all my life.

"Yo' go 'long outer here," growled Liz. "I won't have you boderin' me, yo' g'long 'bout yo' business."

"You know that purple sash of mine, Liz; I've been meaning to give you that."

"All wore out an' faded," she snapped. "I know yo' palarverin' ways."

"I'll drape it over your corn-colour gown, Liz," I pleaded; "and if the captain died you'd be sorry you were so nasty."

I conquered her and concocted some dainties for the captain, who, I know, has a sweet tooth, and set out across the beach for his cabin, a mile from our house. He lives alone, in a regular doll's house, always as neat as wax. I found him sitting by the window, wrapped in an old coat, looking very ill and feeble.

"Hullo, Sunshine," he said, as I brought him my dainties; "well, you didn't forget the old man, and such a room to see you in, an' I look so wretched."

I stood there on the chair.

I went and kissed him. "You do look forlorn. Let me get you a pillow, and brush your lovely white hair; now you are like yourself."

I fussed over him, washed his face, got a chair for his feet, and made him comfortable, then I brewed him some tea and brought that to him on a little table.

"You're a born nurse," he smiled; "now don't go putting the house in order, I'll be about myself in a day or two."

"I know it frets you not to see things ship-shape, cap'n," I said, trying to be nautical.

"You'll spile your gown."

"My old blue gingham, and Liz's kitchen apron," I laughed rolling up my sleeves; "now I am going to wash that window, for you've got to sit there and you can't see a thing." I made such a joke of it, he stopped making objections and watched my efforts with considerable pride. Outside, I mounted on a chair and finished the job. Just as I got it done, something bounced up against the chair, knocking

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my pail over, and nearly upsetting me. It was Mr. Scott's mastiff, and there right behind me—I was blindfolded with a sun-bonnet—was his master watching me.

"Out cleaning by the day?" he asked soberly, his hands in the pockets of his short coat. "Shall I fetch a pail of water in the Jack and Jill style?"

"No, I have just finished. I wanted the captain to see out of doors. I'm beginning to look at life through clean windows myself."

He only smiled that tender smile of his, and I noted how soft and fine his eyes were.

"She *would* do it, John," the captain said, apparently much disturbed. "She can't be ruled."

"Only by kindness," whispered John. "Do you know I used to think, when I was young, that I would like to kiss a girl in a sun-bonnet. They are homely things, but bewitching over a pretty face."

I stood there on the chair and looked straight into his eyes.

"It's lucky you are old," I said. But he turned and walked soberly to the house.

"You needn't blame me for flirting," I muttered, "you brought it on yourself."

"I don't," he answered, turning and laughing at me. What sharp hearing he had, but I was rather pleased, and went home in great good humour. After that, as the captain grew worse, I went often to the cottage, and finally stayed there all the time for the captain was so fond of me. He said no one else did him good but me. Aunt Marg, Liz, and the neighbours helped me, and grandfather stayed at night with the sick man. It was so pitiful to see those old friends together. "You're good for twenty years yet, Josh, if you only thought so," grandfather would say.

"This is my last voyage; I'm near port, Enos," the captain would answer, but grandfather would obstinately hold to his own opinion.

One night, when I lay in the little room off the captain's, Justina snoring on the floor beside my cot, I heard voices in the next room, and saw that grandfather was gone, and Mr. Scott was sitting, holding the captain's wrinkled hand.

From the few words I heard, I knew they were going on a long journey to the past, living through dread days and heavy sorrows. Often the captain mentioned his wife and daughter in sobs, and I knew there must have been a most dastardly crime against his nearest and dearest, to make that good old man an executioner. I realised his heart's blood had been drained, drop by drop, all those miserable years, and that even his last hours were saddened and made fearful by the recollection of a crime.

"This is my last voyage; I'm near port, Enos."

When a pioneer finds his cabin in ashes, his baby's bleeding body, his wife's dishonoured corpse, he does not call aloud in his agony for the law, nor send a slow petition for troops—not he. On his swift-footed steed, he rides night and day across the desert a spectral lonely figure with a white set face; he watches the burning sands for the trail, then on and on, until he nears his prey. When his hands are deep-dyed in Indian blood; when on lonely hillsides, under the gnarled scrub-oaks, or rotting in lonely canons, Apaché corpses lie unburied, then he turns back to his ruined home to go mad and die.

"I don't want to see any parson, John," said the captain; "how could he that never suffered as I have tell me the right? We men made no mistakes—no innocent man died through us; but you, John—when your hour of retribution comes—be sure of proof, swear on your honour to withhold your hand until you know the truth."

"I swear it," said John steadily; "but why say that? Did I not furnish you with proof for all the rest? Would I fail in my own case?"

"You won't forget Margaret—how she has suffered for us?"

"I hold her the noblest among women," said John softly.

"And little Violet—wonderful how she was saved too! And what a ministering angel she has been to me! I followed her those nights on the beach, John. She's an innocent little girl, and you must tell all I've said about her to the man she will love some day, for evil tongues might bring back the old story and mar her happiness."

"I will guard her while I live," said John, "for her own dear sake and Katherine's."

"John," and there was a troubled note in the feeble voice, "I know ye of old, allus brave and fearless, just, but terrible when in anger. If the worst should come to you—I'll not say that—stay your hand. We ain't all strong, God-fearing creatures, though why we're weak I can't say, but we are. Reckon according to the nature and the blood, John, and have pity and forgive. Now bring the child. I like to watch her innocent face. As I pass out of life, I think of how she was saved, that helpless baby, and I see a purpose in it."

When John called me I was ready and went into the room. My brain was sadly confused. Who had saved me, and from what? I saw John sitting by the window watching the sea. Something was troubling him, for he sighed, and passed his hand often across his eyes.

"Read about the storm on Galilee," said the captain; "them poor mariners, no sort of sailors neither, but them boats in 'postolic times warn't never seaworthy."

As I read, his face grew calm and peaceful. "I'll sleep now, Mary. I thought you were your mother, you looked so like her then. I'm weary, dre'ful weary." He reached out his hand to me. "My blessin' on ye, Violet. Some day you'll find your happiness in a good man's love. I want to think your life will be bright, not like my girl's—my Clarice. John, I can't forgive," he cried, with a bitter moan; "on my death-bed I will not forgive."

When he slept, John made me go home, and that afternoon took me for a long drive on the beach. I was so sad and tired, I talked little, but he was kind and gentle When we turned homeward, the sunset sky was ruddy and golden, shimmering beyond the dark rolling waves, and the spray from the sea dashed in our faces, and over the horses shining coats. The blinds of the captain's cottage were down, and there was a Sunday quiet about the place. John went in, and when he came back I knew by his face the worst had happened.

"The captain's ship has sailed," he said, "he is beyond the sunset gates. And oh, such a sad life, too, Letty, borne so bravely, so patiently. I believe he went to heaven," cried John, with quivering lips; "men could not be so sorely tried if there was no forgiveness."

All that night I dreamed of Antonio, waking often with a shuddering cry, thinking I saw that dark, restless face, those terrible eyes. How I prayed that I could forget; and yet, when the clods of earth fell on my old friend's coffin, that dreadful scene came back to me. A power wiser than mine must settle the question of guilt and crime, if there was that injustice. Not all the adverse comment of the world can keep me from believing that old man a good man. Though he sinned much, I think I am sure there was forgiveness and pity for Captain Joshua Dana, that he found rest at last, and met somewhere those dear ones, torn from him so cruelly in this world.

CHAPTER XI.

If I ended my story here, the reader might go on believing my conversion complete, but, like many of the shining lights of revivals, I slid back. There was so little to occupy a girl like me in my life—the neighbours were well, my efforts at

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With enthusiastic praises of my voice.

indiscriminate charity were notable failures, and at home there was no work for me.

John went away a week after the captain's death, and though Mrs. Scott was always kind, Mrs. Gregory contrived to make my visits to the mansion decidedly unpleasant. Before John went he sent me a piano, and that was such a pleasure! Still, grandfather and Aunt Marg would have liked my playing and singing just as well if I had no talent at all. Anything I did was delightful to them, no matter how it was done, until after a time I felt all my best work was wasted on blank walls.

Then it was that I met Maestro, a queer little Italian, who believed through his political views he was forced to flee to the new "contraire." I used to believe all he said about his foes and troubles, but now I know they existed in an extremely fertile imagination. He heard me sing at church, and once met me in the street, introduced himself, and said I had "ze grand voice, and did I not long for ze career?"

I had money saved, for John sent Aunt Marg so much for me, and Maestro got this and all I could ask for besides. They were golden, those hours in the shabby back-room, where he sat at the piano and played for me to sing, sometimes breaking off with enthusiastic praises of my voice, clapping his hands or wiping tears away—he wept so easily, especially about his political troubles! What girl, placed as I was, would not dream of a future! He said I had the voice, and it was only a question of time and teaching when I would be famous.

"I haf one pupil who will make me known," he would cry, "me ze exile. I vill show ze world ze grande alto, ze greatest dare is now to-day."

As my lessons went on, I ceased to care for clothes, or even to comb my hair more than once a day. I fell into artistic disorder. I walked very straight, though, and threw out my chest. I carried my head high, and regarded my past and present life as interesting biographical facts. I held wealth and power in my hands. I could pay John Scott all I had cost him, for the desire had returned. I pictured the scene often. With what grief and reluctance he would accept the money! how he would realise I was not a silly girl, but a woman and an artiste.

He would be sorry—then I had to think a good while what he would be sorry about, for in all my escapades I was the culprit, not he. I scorned allegiance to grandfather and Aunt Marg. They should be glad I had the talents to rise above other women, and certainly they were old-fashioned and odd, anyhow. Only to Justina did I confide, and how her brown face lighted up and her little eyes sparkled.

"You shall go with me always," I said, "to take care of me."

"Si, and I carry a knife to stab anyone who makes Chica angry, like Jeem, the black heart." She hates Jim because I do. She is my echo in everything. Then here is another piece of my wickedness that I hate to confess.

Justina is a clairvoyant. Lots of old Mexican women pretend they are, but Justina really is. She told me when Captain Dana was going to die. She said once (after my trouble) that she knew all the time I would not marry Jim, and she used to go into trances and tell the girls all about their young men.

So one day, after my music lesson, I got her to go into a trance and tell me my future prospects. She sits and looks at the wall, then a quiver goes through her. She shivers all over and finally turns rigid, her eyes dull like a dead person's. She won't say a word till she comes out of her spell, sometimes not then.

"Well?" I asked, as she shivered, and began to rub her elbows, her usual habit on waking up; "am I going to be great?"

"If I tell you, Chica," that is her pet name, meaning "small" in Spanish, but I know not what in Mexican; she invented it when I was a baby; "if I tell you what you do not want, you will be angry; if I do not tell you one word, you will not know."

"Pshaw!" I said, and went away in a very bad temper. She is really like a Mexican sometimes. As I went along the beach I saw advancing toward me a singularly miserable figure. A lean, limping Mexican, clad in rags through which his limbs showed like the bones of a skeleton. Over his long, straight black hair, was a faded sombrero that shaded his seamed and bronzed face and deep-set, wild black eyes.

As we met I looked full in his face. It was the spy at the Hotel Gilbert, Jose Yara. A sudden resolution leaped into my reckless mind. I would speak to him, offer him shelter, and find out that story of the past. I have been cursed with an ungovernable curiosity all my life, and into what pitfalls it has led me.

"Are you ill?" I said in Spanish. His yellow face gleamed at the friendly question in his native tongue.

"Si, I have walked so far." He thrust out his foot in its ragged shoe, and I saw there were unhealed sores and blisters on the dark flesh. "I am so lame, and I have neither friends nor money."

"I know a Mexican woman who will take care of you; my old nurse, Justina."

He looked at me suspiciously. "You are friendly to a stranger, senorita."

"I try to be charitable," I said airily, "and I know more than you think of your people. When you are well I will help you to get work." What a simple and arrogant idiot he must have thought me.

"You are an angel," he cried; and angel in Spanish does not sound so odd as in English; "and the name of señorita?"

I saw a singularly miserable figure.

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"Is Violet Lombard," I said slowly, my eyes on the sand, such an innocent expression on my face. I knew he was studying me.

"I thank you, I will accept your gracious goodness," he said, and I led him to Justina, who scolded roundly at first, but, as I gave her some money in advance, consented to care for the stranger a few days.

"He has been among the Apachés, Justina, and you should pity him." She hates the Indians, for they murdered her husband and her children, so she was more willing to do for him after that.

"How do you know that I was among the Apachés?" Yara asked with bloodless lips. "You are a spy! I never told you, how you know?"

I freed my arm from the clutch of his talon-like fingers. "I know things that happened before I was born," I answered solemnly; "I dream them."

Out on the beach who should I meet but Maestro. I will not write his name, for the poor little soul suffered enough through me without seeing his name in print. He was dancing up and down, wringing his hands, and waving a letter frantically in the air.

"Mees," he cried, running up to me, "mees, this is fortunat. I haf been to your home, I look for you, I meet you. Oh, mees, all are lost!"

"What?" I faltered.

"Ze career, ze artiste. I loaf mees, so I write ze guardeen, Monsieur Scott. I find his address. I zay his charge haf ze grande voice. She vill be prima donna; I am intrest in her. He moost furnish ze monaire to put her on ze stage; she vill repay it."

"You wrote that to John Scott without telling me! That was foolish," I cried bitterly.

"I do not comprend," he replied; "I man of honour, mees; I fil you wif vanity about ze voice, I do wrong until I write ze guardeen. Ze old man he not comprend, he know notin', ze gran'pere; but ze guardeen, I hear he was a gentleman. He is a beaste. Diavolo! Ze lettre is frightful."

Waving a letter frantically in the air.

I tore it from his trembling hand while he roared out his grief in Italian, French, and broken English, calling the very waves to witness what a beast John Scott was. The letter, in John's clear and forcible style, plainly intimated that the writer considered Maestro a charlatan and a fraud, who had taken advantage of the vanity of a very young girl; and that he, John Scott, would be in Galveston in a few days and would see Maestro personally and explain matters to their mutual satisfaction.

"He has no right to interfere," I said angrily; "he is not my guardian, save by his own desire. I have no money of my own, but you told me I could make so much."

"You moost study years. It cost so mooch; zare is no room for poor girls wif voice eef they haf not ze monaire. It is one grande disapponmen to me; I go no farther."

"Some other teacher will give me lessons, and you will be sorry for this some day."

"I may, mees, I may," he said pompously; "but ze honaire of a man is more to me. I haf been insult; I will haf satisfaction."

"They don't fight duels here," I said cruelly; "they don't wait. They simply shoot on sight. John Scott is a monstrous man—the strongest, they say, in the new country you hate."

Having terrified him to my satisfaction, I departed, and for three days indulged in a real fit of temper. I planned revenge on John Scott. I would humiliate him, and show him he had no right to even pretend to guide me. I would let him know I was aware of his past, and silence any objections he had to my career as a singer.

"It is like blackmail, Letty," I said to myself, as I walked to Justina's cabin late one afternoon; "but a vocation excuses all." I would consult my adviser, Justina.

"Chica wants something," she grinned, puffing rings.

"Yes, you know what I asked you?" (I had never told her of the Hotel Gilbert.) "I want you to find out that mystery about my parents and Aunt Marg, and that self-righteous John Scott. You can put Yara into a trance, I know. You have put me to sleep lots of times. You could mesmerise him ever so easy."

"He is a very bad man. He would kill me."

"How would he know it? You say they are never aware of being in a trance. I say, dear," and I laid my cheek against her shoulder, "tell me about me when I was a baby?" She loved to tell that, so she began slowly stroking my hand as she talked.

"I was very miserable, Chica. My husband, my children, my little baby, all killed by Apachés. We lived on the border of Mexico and Texas in a little house, and one day I went way out to pick some flowers for my shrine, for my bambino's birthday, she was just one year old; and when I come back there is only some ashes, still smoking and hot, and some human bones. The Apachés have passed by.

"I walk three days; then I hear horses' hoofs behind me. I turn swift and there are two people on horseback. There is a big man on a bay horse, and there is blood on the man's coat, and his face is the face of the dead; his eyes blaze; his lips are set, and he looks straight before him as if far off he could see his vengeance.

"On the other horse is a woman; she is dusty and her gown is torn and draggled; she has that wild look too and sees nothing; she is a young woman, but her hair is as white as snow.

"'It is a Mexican woman,' said the man, 'and quite mad I think. Margaret, those ashes we passed must have been her home.'

"The woman did not seem to hear; she looks that queer way, straight before her, and then the baby cries, such a wee, feeble little cry, but I hear, I hear! something stirs in me; a great longing. I ran to that big horse, and stretched out my arms. Ah, Chica, how I cry!

"'My baby, my baby, give it to me, mine is burnt! O, gracious God, no, this is mine, my baby!'

"I drag it from his arms, and hold it to my breast. I feel it alive from my life; it opens its blue eyes like the sky; it is such a white baby, and mine was so brown with its bright eyes; God has sent me this one though, and I take it. He lifts me up on the big horse behind him, and we ride on to San Antonio. I keep you five years in my cabin, my Chica, and when they take you away I follow you."

"And you never asked any more about me?"

"I never asked, Chica, I wanted only my baby."

(To be continued next week.)

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UNDER THE SOFA.

THE room was hung in pale blue silk; the Prayer from Orpheus was open on a spinet; the chairs had lyres for backs; a mahogany writing desk; a white bed with its decoration in roses; painted doves in pairs along the cornice; the whole seems to smile with a tender grace. The lamp shone softly, and the flickering firelight filled the dusky corners as with palpitating wings. Seated before the writing-desk in a loose gown, her delicate neck inclined under the pale, magnificent aureole of her hair, Juliette is looking over old letters, which have lain, tied up with ribbons, forgotten in the drawers.

The stroke of midnight sounds; it is the sign of the merging of the old year into the new. The dainty clock, upon which a laughing, gilded love is perched, announces that the year 1793 is ended.

The sharp, pure air quickens the flame in the fireplace. Julie is going to burn the letters, but not without reading them.

They are arranged in order, for Julie infuses everything pertaining to her with the exactness of her mind. Some, already yellowed, are dated three years back; and Julie, in the silence of the night, lives over again enchanted hours. Not a single page is consigned to the flames before the beloved syllables that cover it are ten times spelled.

The calm is profound around her. Occasionally, as the hours pass, she goes to the window and, lifting the curtain, sees in the silent darkness the spire of Saint Germain-des-Prés silvered in the moonlight; then she takes up again her work of slow and regretful destruction. And how can she refrain from drinking in for a last time these delicious pages? How can she give to the flames those dear lines without first engraving them for ever on her heart? The calm is profound around her, and her soul is palpitating with youth and love. She reads:

"I see you when absent, Julie. I walk surrounded by the images my fancy creates. I see you, not motionless and cold, but warm, alive; always changing, always perfect. I draw around you in my dreams the most magnificent spectacles of the universe. How happy is he who is Julie's lover! All things charm him, because he sees her in them all. Loving her, he loves to live; he admires the world that she illumines; he cherishes the earth that blooms under her footsteps. Love reveals to him hidden meanings in all that surrounds him. He understands the infinite forms of creation; they all picture forth Julie's image: he hears the innumerable voices of nature; they all murmur Julie's name. Enraptured, he lets his gaze float out upon the broad sea of daylight, knowing that the same radiance bathes Julie's face, like a divine caress thrown over the most perfect of human forms. To-night the first stars will make him tremble; he will think, 'Perhaps she is too looking at them now.' He breathes her in all the perfumes of the air. He could kiss the earth that bears her. . . ."

She reads and dreams. The night is ending. Already a pale, grey streak shows under the curtains; it is the dawn. The servants have commenced their tasks; she wishes to finish hers. Were those voices she just now heard? No; the calm is profound around her.

The calm is profound, but it is because the snow deadens the sound of footsteps. Men are approaching; they are here; loud knocks shake the door.

She has not time to hide the letters, to close the desk. All that she can do she does; she gathers up the papers in her arms and throws them under the sofa which has a deep valance around it. Some of the letters are scattered outside on the carpet; she shoves them under with her foot, seizes a book, and falls into an arm-chair.

The President of the District enters, followed by twelve patriots. He is a former chair-mender by the name of Brochet, whose limbs tremble as though with fever, and whose blood-shot eyes are perpetually rolling as though at sights of horror.

He signs to his men to guard the doors, and addresses Julie:

"Citizeness, we have just been informed that you are in correspondence with various agents of Pitt, and with emigrants and conspirators in prisons. I come to seize your papers in the name of the law! You were designated to me a long time ago as an aristocrat of the most dangerous kind. Citizen Rapaix, who stands before you"—he pointed to one of his men—"has admitted that in the severe winter of 1789 you gave him money and clothing to corrupt him. Lenient magistrates, without proper public spirit, have spared you too long. But I am master now, and you shall not escape the guillotine. Give up your papers, citizeness."

"Take them yourself," said Julie, "my desk is open."

Sundry notices of births, deaths, or marriages, old bills and business papers still remained in the desk, and Brochet examined them one by one. He turned them from side to side, and felt them as would a man uncertain of his ability to read, and at intervals ejaculated, "Bad! the name of the ci-devant king is not erased. This is bad, bad!"

Julie concludes from this that the search is to be a long minute one. She cannot refrain from casting a furtive glance toward the sofa, and she sees the corner of a letter peeping out from under the valance like the white ear of a cat. At sight of this her anguish suddenly ceases. The certainty that all is lost brings a tranquil assurance to her mind, and upon her face a calm like that of security. She is sure the men will see this point of paper that she sees, gleaming white upon the red carpet. It seems to force the eye toward it. But she does not know whether the discovery will come at once or later, and the doubt occupies and amuses her. She even in this tragic moment watches the patriots as they approach or turn from the sofa, as though their movements were part of a game.

Brochet, who has finished with the papers in the desk, becomes impatient, and declares that nothing shall prevent his finding what he seeks.

He overturns the furniture, examines the back of the pictures, and raps with his sword-hilt on the wood-work to discover possible hiding-places. He finds none. He removes the glass from the mirrors to see if anything is concealed behind. There is nothing.

During this time the men are tearing up some of the boards in the flooring; they swear that a worthless aristocrat shall not make game of good *sans-culottes*, such as they. But not one of them has seen the little white point peeping out from under the valance of the sofa.

They take Julie through the other rooms of the house, and demand all the keys. They break up tables, smash the window panes in fragments, rip open chairs and disembowel couches. And still they find nothing.

But Brochet has not yet given up; he returns to the bedroom.

"In the name of God! The papers are here—I am sure of it!"

He examines the sofa, declares it suspicious-looking and thrusts the whole length of his sabre through it five or six times. Still he finds no trace of what he is seeking, and with a frightful oath he gives his men the signal for departure.

He has reached the door, when, turning to Julie with his fist extended toward her, he exclaims:

"Tremble when you see me again!"

He is the last one to pass out.

At last they are gone. She listens to the sound of their footsteps dying out in the stairway. She is saved! Nor has her imprudence betrayed him!

. . . . . .

Julie shone for a time with considerable brilliancy under the Consulate; but in the midst of her splendour she would often murmur at night sad secrets to the trees on the park. She was stronger to withstand the terrors of death than the trials of love.

Her husband became a baron and a prefect under the Empire, and little Pierre her son died, a colonel of gendarmerie, at Versailles, in 1859.

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